HISTORY OF THE HAPPY VALLEY AREA IN THE 1930'S - 1940'S.

AN INTERVIEW WITH GRACE FRANKE(MRS. RUDOLPH)
MARCH 6, 1978

This is an interview with Grace Franke (Mrs. Rudolph) and her daughter, Mrs. Barbara Franke Boyle, on March 6, 1978. The interviewer is Angela Broadhead for the Lafayette Historical Society.

AB: Were you born in the Bay Area, Mrs. Franke?

GF: Yes, I was born in Oakland, Calif. My mother and father and five children came from England about 1878. They stopped in Salt Lake City, Utah, where they lived for one winter. Then they went to Idaho and worked there during the summer. They returned to Salt Lake, stayed that winter and then came to California in the spring of about 1880.

AB: Do you know anything about the way they travelled?

GF: Yes, they travelled by train and I think it took them 5 days. They had to stop and shoo the buffalo off the tracks. They came to Oakland but I don't they knew anyone here. My father got a job in San Francisco and worked there until he established his own business in San Francisco. He was a machinist-blacksmith on Beale Street about where the PGE building is now. He was in business until the fire of 1906 and he lost his business when all that was burnt out. Then he left and went to Oakland and built his business on Franklin St.He retired and then worked for the Union Gas Engine Co. They made machinery, I believe. They were down in East Oakland, near 23rd Ave. He ~~woked~~ worked there until he retired at 65.

My mother's mother followed them to this country with 5 or 6 children. She lost her husband before their last child was born. Up until that time she ran her own business which was a bolt works in England. She died at 74.

Let me tell you about an incident in my parents' life when they lived in Pocatello, Idaho. There were wild Shoshone Indians up there at that time. They would come into the house and take the covers off the saucepans on the stove just to see what was in them. They said they wanted biscuits and tea!

BB: Mother, how many children came out here with grandpa and grandma?

GF: There were 5 children. I was born here in Oakland in Fruitvale in 1893. They lived down on Fifth St. where everybody else lived at that time. Later they built their home on 26th Ave. in Fruitvale. We had lamps at that time because there was no gas or electricity. It was my job to clean and polish the coal oil lamps every day. And I ground the coffee every day, too. We had a coffee mill on the wall.

My father would go to San Francisco every day to work and so did my brothers. They went down to the train and then took the ferry. Later on I worked in San Francisco, too. I worked for the New Zealand Fire Insurance as a stenographer.

AB: How did you learn to be a stenographer?

GF: I went to Heald's Business College when they were on 16th and San Pablo. I had also taken it in Fremont High School.

AB: Did you meet your husband in San Francisco, Mrs. Franke?

GF: No, I met him in Oakland. His father came to Oakland from Germany around 1870 and he married in Oakland. All their children were born in Oakland. My husband, Rudolph, was born in 1882 and we were married in 1924. He bought 20 acres here in Lafayette.

AB: How did your husband happen to become interested in Lafayette?

GF: He just liked this area because it was beautiful. There were no facilities here; we had to pipe water from up the creek. We had a spring and a well that we piped water for drinking. There was a house on the property we bought from a dentist. It was a summer home. In 1937 we built a permanent home across the creek--a two-story Tudor style house--and we moved out here permanently. By this time there was water from the water company. Also the low-level tunnel was in. Before we had to go over the top of the hill.

AB: Tell your experiences of coming through the old tunnel.

GF: It was pretty narrow and dark--not a light! In the wintertime the tunnel leaked. That was one of the reasons they built the low-level tunnel.

I'd like to tell you about coming out here to attend the first dance at Town Hall. I came with a cousin and we came out in a horse and buggy in 1914 (when Town Hall was built) when I was about 21 years old.

AB: What do you remember about that first dance at Town Hall?

GF: It was a big dance. We stayed at the Thomson's (the blacksmith) home. We danced until 12 o'clock and then they served refreshments. Then we danced afterwards. The hall was filled with people; it was pretty exciting. We danced until early in the morning. I remember Mrs. Bonner and also Greg. I don't remember what we had at the midnight supper but I do know there was an awful lot of food. I think everybody brought their favorite food.

BB: How many people were living here when we moved here in 1937, mother?

GF: Not too many because when we moved here there were only about 6 families. Mrs. Gerow was an elderly lady. She lived in that house directly across from my house. Later Mr. M.O. Petersen bought it. I think Colonel M.M. Garrett had just built. The Thomson's house was in the valley. That's about all the families.

Let me tell you about the oil wells in Happy Valley. There was an oil well upon Los Arabis Road up the hill right near the Camillia Place(Mr. Feather's). Dr. Leo Musser built in the 1930's when my husband sold him about 5 acres of land. After they built the house, oil started to leak out of the foundation of the house. Engineers tested the soil for oil but there was no oil in any quantity.

BB: Later, Dr. Musser bought the land across the way and developed Los Arabis. He passed away recently.

AB:Tell us a bit more about the activities around your house.

GF: My husband built the Pavilion because he belonged to the Masonic Lodge and we had dances out there. He built the Pavilion even before he built the big house. We used to have lots of picnics. The Pavilion had a white pine dance floor.

BB: It was a large building, completely enclosed, roof and all. It had a fireplace at one end. The stables were across the creek. Throughout the creek there were picnic tables. The pool was built around 1934-35. Various groups such as the Shriners, the Veterans and the Horseman's Association had their picnics, barbeques and dances here. They played baseball in the field and it was really a lot of fun.

AB: Did you spend all your vacations out here?

BB: We always spent weekends and vacations out here because my father's business was out here in Walnut Creek. He had the Walnut Creek Cannery. It was a tomatoe cannery and he sold mostly to Campbell Soup Co. They also made tomatoe paste and tomatoe catsup. It was sort of a local industry located where Gemco store is today. Later my Dad sold the company to Hamilton Davis.

AB: Were the products that you canned grown locally?

GF: Tomatoes were all grown in the area and as far away as Vacaville. Tomatoes were picked when they were vine ripened or Campbell wouldn't take them. Campbell wouldn't take them if they were irrigated, either.

AB: Would you like to describe the rest of Happy Valley? Were there farms?

GF: No, there were mostly cattle across the street here.

BB: Mr. Cosso farmed then and I think he still does now. He farmed onion, tomatoes and such. The property was right by the Happy Valley School. The cattle ranches were up near Los Arabis and were farmed by the Alexanders. I remember going

up and seeing them cut the horns off and brand the cattle.

Happy Valley Road wasn't paved and, of course, there weren't too many cars out here. They'd drive the cattle down the road and we'd run out and shut the gate so the cattle couldn't come in!

Mr. C. Malley had someone to attend his place because he didn't live here. Later it was subdivided and it became North and South Peardale. One of the early houses around here was the Lee Gummow house. They built before we did. And Mr. and Mrs. Frank McGuire were one of the oldest residents--- I think she was a Milliken. The Petersen's were across the street from us.

Some of the other people we knew in Lafayette were the Armanino's, the Wilkinson's and the Olivera's.

AB: What would you say were the biggest changes you've see in the 40 years you have lived in Lafayette, Mrs. Franke?

GF: The new tunnel, piped water when East Bay Municipal District was formed and the building of the new high school, Acalanes.

AB: Barbara, would you like to mention some of the changes in Lafayette since you were a child?

BB: The major change was that Lafayette changed from a "get-away" from town vacation spot to a suburban community. Freeways and houses changed the landscape.

AB: The historical society thanks you both for telling us about Lafayette and especially about the history of the Happy Valley area.